

"WHAT TO DO AND HOW TO DO IT"

Good Annual Meetings don't just happen. They are the result of detailed and careful planning in addition to energetic and intelligent handling. Here Are the Essentials for a Good Annual Meeting:

1. Careful planning
2. A meeting date and hour convenient for members
3. An adequate meeting place
4. Good publicity
5. An interesting program
6. Assurance of a real election by secret ballot
7. A competent chairman
8. An attendance committee of neighborhood leaders

Start Planning Early:

Planning should begin at least three months before the Annual Meeting.

1. Overall Planning. The board and manager should supervise plans and coordinate the work of the various committees.

- a. Review By-laws to make sure all legal requirements for the meeting will be observed. Desirable amendments to by-laws should be considered and REA's advice on the best wording obtained in time for inclusion in the annual meeting notice. The Board should mail to each member who hasn't received one a copy of the co-op by-laws, so that he will know his rights and responsibilities as a member.

- b. Committee Assignments. A committee including the president, secretary, manager and perhaps the co-op attorney may be made responsible for getting out official notices, ballots, etc. The Nominating Committee should be encouraged to nominate more candidates than are to be elected so that members will have a real choice. Publicity, Entertainment, Refreshment, and Attendance Committees are almost indispensable. Committee chairmen, not necessarily directors of the co-op, should be dependable persons who will do a good job.

- c. Physical Equipment. The manager usually checks with each committee as to its special needs. He sees to obtaining equipment such as tables, blackboard, ballot boxes, prepared tally sheets, duplicate membership lists, loud speakers, movie projector, etc., and makes sure it is available when needed. He also sees to adequate electric connection. So far as available materials permit, REA will provide backdrops, posters and displays on request.

2. Time of Meeting.

a. The Meeting Date is fixed by the by-laws. Any desired permanent change in the date should be made by amendment. However, a board resolution to postpone the meeting in a particular year may be enough in some cases.

b. Hour of Meeting. The time should be convenient for members. Official business should be finished early enough for farmer-members to get back to evening chores.

3. Meeting Place. The town or village is usually specified in the by-laws. Selection of a suitable place should be made, keeping in mind its availability on a specified date, ample seating capacity and recreational facilities.

4. Publicity. Plan an effective publicity campaign several months ahead. Suggestions for newsletter and press and radio releases are included in this kit and they should be used more to stimulate ideas than for copying. Announcements made at schools, farm organization meetings, and churches are also helpful. If one newspaper reaches most of the areas served, its publisher may be interested in a special edition. REA can help him.

5. Appliance Exhibit. The annual meeting provides an excellent opportunity for bringing members up-to-date on newest applications of electricity, and for bringing dealers up-to-date on the wants and needs of the members. The manager should arrange for space and power outlets for dealers' displays. The first step is to call a meeting of all local dealers, including the wholesale suppliers. Encourage them to display at least a few of the newer types of electric equipment. If only one item of a kind is available, suggest that it be donated for a prize. If the item is not available for display, large photographs, drawings, and descriptive booklets should be encouraged. (This is particularly true of hay driers, barn cleaners and the like.) New devices (such as a home milk pasteurizer) might be worked into the program for the meeting, preferably by actual stage demonstration.

6. The Program should be made interesting to families and friends as well as members. Combining some entertainment and educational features with the official business will usually promote a larger and more interested audience. Printed programs which include an annual report are always an attraction, especially if well prepared and well printed. The typical order of business is listed in the by-laws. The following points may be helpful.

a. Roll Call. Check members (or proxies, if any) as they enter. You can prevent a bottleneck by having several checkers with accurate membership lists. Hand out ballots, programs, etc., to members as they register. Special postcard reminders mailed to members several days before and handed in at the door can save lots of time in checking off names.

b. Reports should be brief, the most comprehensive being the manager's report. After each report, questions from the members should be encouraged and answered fully. The chairman should preface this part of the program with a brief explanation of an REA co-op, its non-profit private business nature, and other basic principles. "A Guide for Members of REA Cooperatives", available from REA, gives the necessary facts for this brief introduction.

7. Nominations and Election.

a. Nominations. The chairman should allow fair opportunity for additional nominations from the floor, particularly if only one candidate for each office has been named in advance. A secret ballot is meaningless unless there is a real choice. The chairman should wait until there are at least two candidates for each office or until at least 30 seconds have passed since the last nomination, before recognizing a motion to close nominations.

b. The Election. The ballot should have enough space for writing in candidates. There should be enough tellers for speedy counting of the vote and to prevent mistakes, they should work in teams of three. Results should be read to the meeting by the secretary or chairman. Ballots should be kept for two months.

8. The Chairman's Function. Success of the meeting will largely depend on the chairman; if the president cannot preside, he should find the best possible man for the job.

The Chairman should study in advance all by-law provisions concerning the Annual Meeting as well as matters likely to be discussed. "Rules of Order," available from REA, should be kept handy for reference. The Chairman should know and stick to the rules; be fair to everyone; make sure everyone knows what is being discussed and voted on; keep the meeting from dragging; and make the audience feel at ease.

Promoting a Good Attendance:

1. An attendance Committee should include key members in every neighborhood served by the co-op. It should keep members interested in the meeting and should arrange for pooling transportation to the meeting.

2. Music. Group singing, perhaps supported by a local high school band, helps to pep up a meeting and create an atmosphere of good fellowship.

3. Movies. If you plan to use movies, Information Services, REA, Washington, can furnish details and advice on how and where to get film, projector, etc.

4. Educational Talk. Good speakers on general REA subjects--farm electrification, community development, etc.--can be found among farm co-op or civic leaders, extension workers and other rural educators from local schools or the state college.

5. An Appliance Exhibit. will help not only to attract a large audience, but to promote more effective use of electricity. Appliances should be shown in operation if possible, and emphasis should be on farm applications.

6. Other Entertainment. Amateur talent from the area, professionals from the local radio station, playlet or skit, quiz contest, all are good attendance builders.

7. Attendance Prizes are also of some value as incentives to attendance, but their drawing power can be easily overrated and they should be used sparingly.

8. Refreshments. A light lunch or refreshments to be served with members' own package lunches, gives members a chance to get better acquainted and to meet the board and paid personnel.

To Summarize: The Annual Meeting is an essential element of co-op functioning. To get members to come, the board should convince them that they are needed and that they will find the meeting worthwhile. This means a well prepared business meeting conducted democratically, a real election by secret ballot, an appliance exhibit which amounts to a small-scale electrical fair, and just enough recreational features to assure a good time for all who come. To help boards and managers plan the Annual Meeting, REA field men in the region may be available for consultation.